

Pennies in Fountains by [maplestreet83](#)

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Genre: Friendship, i'm a sucker for the friendships between them all, summer of 85, the kids being happy and carefree and enjoying summer and exploring the new mall in town

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Characters: Dustin Henderson, Eleven | Jane Hopper, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Steve Harrington, Will Byers

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Summary:

The party visits the new Starcourt Mall for the first time and El makes some wishes.

Pennies in Fountains

The late June sun was shining bright, reflecting hot off the pavement of the vast parking lot of the mall as they piled off the car. Steve had given them a ride and as the kids slammed the doors closed he was hanging out from the driver's side window, Ray Bans crooked on his nose as he yelled over the music blasting from the car radio:

"Okay, dipshits! I'll be back to pick you up at 6 o'clock flat. And I won't wait around, you better be by the main doors then or you're gonna walk your asses back home. Got it?"

"Yeah, yeah, at six, got it!" Max confirmed, waving her hand dismissively as she adjusted her baseball cap on her head ("No I'm not copying you, Dustin! I wore this back home too. And besides it's way cooler than yours anyway.") as the group started to walk away from the car.

"Thanks for the ride, dude! You're the best!" Dustin yelled out to Steve with a wide grin and a two-thumbs-up before he too turned around to walk toward the mall.

Lucas let out an impressed whistle as he looked up at the shiny new facade of the huge building sprawled in front of them.

"Your mom was right, Mike. It's massive!"

"Uh-huh, it sure is," Mike answered, sounding distracted as his eyes scanned the parking lot for a certain Hawkins police cruiser. Spotting it just by the front entrance of the mall, he almost jumped a bit, a smile spreading to his face.

"El's over there you guys!" he said, pointing his finger at the tan car, next to which Chief Hopper was standing, talking quietly with El standing next to him, looking around the busy parking lot, her eyes wide.

"Did you really think she wouldn't show up?" Lucas asked as they all

started to walk towards the parked police car.

“No, but I thought we’d be here before her. Didn’t count on Steve getting us lost,” Mike answered, shooting a glance at Dustin who lifted his hands up defensively.

“It was just one turn! And we got here alright. Right?” he explained, nudging Will’s arm with his elbow.

“Well yeah. But I agree that he should’ve taken Lexington, not Magnolia,” Will said with a shrug and Dustin was about to correct him, continuing the disagreement they’d had on the way there, as they reached Hopper’s car.

“Hi, El!” Mike greeted her with a wave and a wide smile that seemed to be plastered on his face every time the two got to spend some time together.

“Hey,” El answered with a smile of her own, excitedly bouncing on the balls of her feet.

“You finally decided to show up then,” Hopper remarked with a smirk, leaning on the side of his car. Dustin was about to launch into another round of explanations but Hopper cut him off before he could even start.

“Alright so when are you all getting picked up again?”

“At six,” Mike answered.

“On the dot,” Lucas added.

“Okay, so I’ll be here then too. I’ll be parked around here,” Hopper explained, turning to El who looked up at him with an understanding nod. Leaning up from the side of the car and fishing his car key from his pocket, Hopper started to walk around the car towards the driver’s side door. Clearly in thought, he ran his fingers along his mustache and added: “What else... You have the money I gave you, kid?”

“Yes,” El assured him, patting her hand over the front pocket of her denim overalls.

“Good, don’t lose it. And don’t waste it on dumb stuff, even how much these dweebs want to play Castles and Dragons or something,” Hopper said, opening the car door.

“It’s Dungeons and Dragons. And you can’t play it in an arcade,” Dustin remarked, glancing sideways at Max like that was the dumbest thing he’d ever heard. Gripping the top of the open car door, Hopper pulled his lips into a tight line, narrowing his eyes, but then decided it wasn’t worth getting into, saying:

“Well have fun kids! And I’ll see you back here at six, El!”

“At six,” El confirmed with a nod, slowly starting to walk with the rest of the party towards the mall entrance. “See you!” And with a short wave mirroring El’s, Hopper shut the car door and drove away, and the six of them made their way towards the impressive entrance with its shining neon lights and lettering: Starcourt Mall.

They entered through the glass doors and El’s eyes went wide with all the sights and sounds hitting her. The wide and high-ceilinged walkway was filled with people, chatting and walking around holding colorful shopping bags and huge soda cups. Lining the walls were numerous shops with their window displays filled with mannequins wearing all kinds of bright and summery clothes. And over it all there was a constant drone of cheery jingles and commercials streaming out of the loudspeakers, mixing with the happy chatter of all the people and making the whole space bustle with activity.

“Wow,” Will voiced as they slowly walked along, eyeing the different storefronts.

“This place is huge,” Dustin added, everyone nodding along.

“Back home those are real, though,” Max said, pointing to the plastic palm trees on pots decorating the middle of the walkway.

“Well I hate to break this to you, but palm trees aren’t indigenous to Indiana,” Dustin commented.

“What, really? Hadn’t noticed!” Max answered, her eyes wide in

faked surprise and then she launched animatedly into a story about a huge palm tree next to her old school that everyone had took turn on climbing in second grade. Mike looked over at El, her head turning as her curious eyes roamed around the busy mall.

“What do you think? Is it like you had imagined?” he asked as they passed a kiosk selling sunglasses.

“It’s...” she started, pausing as she tried to find a word to describe it. “It’s a lot. But it’s good,” she settled on, looking over to Mike with an excited smile on her face, reaching out her hand to grab his.

“I’m happy you like it,” Mike said, a bright smile on his face as he took her hand, squeezing it just a bit.

They soon reached the main square of the mall, the food court and its tables sprawled around a fountain.

“Wow,” El said, looking up at the water that spouted upwards with a rush, glistening in the sunlight coming in through the skylights above it.

“That’s cool,” Lucas agreed and they all followed El as she made her way up to the fountain, reaching out her hand to feel the water droplets spraying from it.

“What’s that?” she asked, her brow knit as she noticed the glittering copper and silver on the bottom of the small pool.

“People throw coins in fountains sometimes, if they want to wish for something,” Mike explained, joining El as she leaned over the tiled side of the fountain, getting a closer look.

“Good change that could be used for arcade games,” Dustin pointed out with a disapproving shake of his head. El leaned back straight, taking out the money Hopper had given her, her mouth stretching sideways as she noticed it was just bills.

“Yeah no, don’t throw those,” Max told her. “I’m pretty sure Hopper would count that as ‘dumb stuff’”

“You could have one huge wish then, though,” Will pointed out.

"We can come back later. When you have bought something and have some change," Mike explained and El nodded, stuffing the money back into her pocket, still looking up at the flowing water.

"Ready to check out the new arcade?" Lucas asked, pointing over at the neon sign over its doorway.

"Yes, time to establish my status as the Dig Dug champion over here too," Max answered, theatrically cracking her knuckles as they started to walk toward the arcade.

"Not if I beat you to it!" Dustin exclaimed, breaking into a sprint to get to the game before her.

"I call dibs on Centipede!" Will yelled after them as the two ran towards the arcade, elbowing each other out of the way as they did.

The hours flew by, first at the cool and brightly colored arcade, surrounded by cheery bleeps and sounds of the games, Dustin shaking El by the shoulders and yelling excitedly as she cleared her first ever level on Space Invaders. Then at the comics store where the boys rummaged through all the new arrivals, piling together their money to buy the new X-Men. At the sunglass kiosk Max convinced El to just get the heart-shaped sunglasses she had been glancing at everytime they had passed, and with a wide grin El had handed over one of the bills Hopper had given her to the girl working the stand, and let Max guide her over to one of the close-by store windows to look at her reflection.

"See, they look great! Totally bitchin'," Max commented with a grin as El leaned close to the reflective window.

"Yeah. Totally," she echoed, brimming with excitement of the new purchase and the endless possibilities it brought with it. She had bought this. All on her own. The glasses weren't hand-me-down from Nancy, or Hopper; they were certainly not like the harsh and plain things she'd been made to wear back in the lab. And yes, maybe they were a bit silly (as Lucas had pointed out, saying she should save her money for the video store they were going to next), but buying them

had been her own decision. And that thought filled El with such joy and excitement that she could barely contain herself for jumping up and down, instead taking Mike's hand as they started to head to the video store.

It was quarter to six when they were all back at the food court, around a table filled with food they had managed to buy with their last remaining money. El was eating her strawberry ice cream, listening intently at the others as they tried to come up with the time to go and see *Back to the Future*.

"Come on guys, we have to go opening night! That would be so awesome!" Dustin said between mouthfuls of fries. "I'm sure I can get Steve to drive us."

"Maybe, but that's way past my stupid curfew," Max commented with a roll of her eyes, taking a sip of her soda.

"Same here. My mom said I need to clean up the basement for the Fourth of July party and I know she won't let me leave even if I've done that already. She'll come up with a zillion other things for me to do," Mike said, picking at his fries with annoyance on his face, already imagining all the pointless chores his mom would probably have lined up for him.

"On Friday? We could go to the early showing and Jonathan can drive us, he doesn't work till late," Will suggested, Lucas shaking his head and starting to explain that he had to babysit Erica that day and there was no way he was bringing her along. He accentuated his words with indignant hand movements, causing a paper napkin to fall off the table. Tuning out of the conversation, El watched it fall to the floor by her feet. She leaned to pick it up and as she did so, she noticed a flash of copper by the leg of the table. A wide smile spread on her face as she reached down to pick up the penny. She had spent all of her money on a VHS of *'Gone with the Wind'* and her ice cream, and she had no coins left to throw in the fountain. But this changed that.

Grinning, El straightened her back, sitting up again and holding the

penny between her thumb and index finger, as she turned to Mike who was engrossed in a conversation with Will, asking if Jonathan or his mom could drive them to the movies on Saturday. El lightly tapped him on his shoulder and he turned to face her, his expression instantly softening.

“Oh cool! Where did you get that?” he asked, everyone else also turning their attention to EL and the faded copper coin she was holding.

“Found it on the ground. It’s for the fountain,” El explained, tilting her head a bit toward the fountain on the other side of the food court.

“Well finding a penny is also lucky so tossing that into the fountain will give your wish double the odds of coming true,” Dustin noted with an excited smile, finishing up his fries and wiping his greasy hands to his shorts before looking at his watch. “You should do it now, though, it’s almost six and we don’t wanna be late. I really don’t want to walk all the way back home in that heat.”

And with that they quickly scarfed down their food before trashing the wrappers and cups and weaving through the tables as they left the busy food court, circling around it to the fountain.

“Alrighty, so you turn your back to the fountain, like this,” Dustin explained, guiding El by her shoulder as she slowly turned around, holding out her hand, her palm up flat, the penny resting on it.

“Now you can throw it over your shoulder,” Will instructed, mimicking the motion with his hand.

“Why?” El asked, her nose crinkling in confusion, her gaze reaching out to Mike. He just shrugged, saying:

“I don’t really know. It’s just how it’s done, I guess it’s some kind of tradition.” Deciding to accept the explanation, El lifted up her hand, briefly closing her eyes as she thought of her wish.

“And remember, you can’t tell us what you wished for, otherwise it won’t come true,” Max pointed out as El opened her eyes again.

Trying to remember everything, and after one more quick glance behind her at the fountain, she tossed the coin, it hitting the water with a bright sound. El whirled around to see the coin sink to the bottom of the small pool, joining the other small coins that speckled the tiles.

And when they all started to walk towards the exit, Will complimenting El's throwing skills, and Lucas taking the opportunity to poke fun of Mike's lack of such skills and the whole party erupting into jokes and laughter, El didn't have to say her wish out loud, as it was clearly visible on the smile on her face: she wished that she could spend every single day that summer like this, exploring new places and doing new exciting things surrounded by the laughter and care of her friends.